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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus news coverage September 6 on the UN referendum; on the meeting between U.S. President George W. Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao today; and on the 2008 presidential poll. The pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran a banner headline on page four that read "Notifying the UN in a Letter, the United States [Says It] Does Not Accept [the View That] Taiwan Is Part of China."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a commentary in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" called the UN referendum a "profitable deal" for President Chen Shui-bian, as it costs him nothing and he is guaranteed to win it. A separate "Apple Daily" op-ed, however, provides a different perspective for Chen's push for the UN referendum. The article said Chen is ready to run the risk of splitting with Washington and pushing for Taiwan independence because he foresees that he will play an overlord position to manipulate and mediate between Frank Hsieh and Su Tseng-chang after he steps down. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, said "Taipei has run out of patience with the creative ambiguity of the past, and it demands that the US respect the will of the Taiwanese." End summary.

A) "Taiwan's Gambling Money"

Columnist Antonio Chiang noted in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] (9/6):

"... For A-Bian alone, the UN referendum is a guaranteed profitable deal which costs him nothing and which he will never lose; having dragged the KMT into the game means that he has achieved half of the result he desires. The Americans' initial reactions made Chen half joyful and half worried, but to his surprise, the Americans announced that neither the Republic of China nor Taiwan is a state. Such a statement made the DPP overjoyed at their unexpected good fortune -- the national name 'ROC' that the DPP has tried but failed to get rid of for years can finally be tossed away effortlessly. Many DPP members thus greatly admire A-Bian's wisdom.

"Unfortunately, even though the UN referendum is nothing but a campaign strategy, it has a very powerful external effect. It may be a successful approach in terms of campaign strategies, but the external consequences that it projects will surely do damage to Taiwan's long-term interests. The first [consequence] is that Taiwan has annoyed [U.S. President George W.] Bush, and as a result, U.S. arms procurements and assistance [to Taiwan] in terms of [its bid to join] international organizations have been suspended. For Bush, A-Bian no longer enjoys any credibility, and Washington and Beijing will draw a clearer red line for Taiwan. Taiwan's national status and elbow room in the international community will be further squeezed, while cooperation between Washington and Beijing will be enhanced.

"Beijing saw that the KMT has failed to counterbalance the DPP; that

the Americans can hardly manage A-Bian; that A-Bian can use the referendum to replace the high threshold for constitutional amendments; and that the Taiwan issue is on the verge of getting out of control. With the Chinese Communist Party's 17th National Congress looming, Taiwan's referendum has posed a major challenge to Hu Jintao's prestige, and Hu will certainly have to deal with it. ..."

B) "Behind the Scenes - Bian Single-Handedly Challenges Two Hegemonies: the United States and China"

Shih Chih-yu, professor of political science at National Sun Yat-sen University and National Taiwan University, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] (9/6):

"One of the major reasons for Chen Shui-bian to be ready to run the risk of breaking with the United States and promoting Taiwan independence is that Frank Hsieh has finally accepted [Chen's proposal of] pairing up with Su Tseng-chang to run for the presidency. Chen is happy about it not because he trusts that Su will protect him after he steps down in the future, but because Su has actual solid strength and will never fight alone like Annette Lu. As a result, [Chen knows that] his position as a mediator between [the two of them] will be increasingly important. ..."

"The only factor that can now obstruct Chen from continuing to enjoy his wealth and power after he steps down will be the KMT. Should the DPP lose the [presidential] election, Chen will likely face all kinds of struggles, which will surely be poles apart from the overlord position he dreams of so that he can continue manipulate Hsieh and Su. This explains why Chen wants to challenge Washington and Beijing constantly; as long as he succeeds in defeating the KMT, he will be able to rest completely with his mind at ease."

C) "Why US Criticism Was Unavoidable"

Professor Chen Hurng-yu of Tamkang University opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (9/6):

"What did Wilder mean? The Taiwan that the TRA promises to help protect is a Taiwan under ROC rule. The party the US wants to have dealings with is the government of the ROC, not a 'Taiwan' government. From the point of view of US law, 'Taiwan' is another term for 'ROC,' and these two are one and the same. Since the US does not recognize Taiwan as a country, and also calls the existence of the ROC into question, then what is the legal nature of the identity the US wants to have dealings with?"

"In the past, US officials could hide behind creative ambiguity. But now the situation in Taiwan has changed. There is a bigger push for independence and national sovereignty and a desire to have the respect of the international community. Taipei has run out of patience with the creative ambiguity of the past, and it demands the US respect the will of the Taiwanese. Unfortunately, faced with this new situation US officials still react within the old framework, a framework that nobody in Taiwan can identify with. The current situation was therefore unavoidable."

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